

# First 'Apostasy Day' defends the right to leave religion

Posted: Fri, 28th Aug 2020

An international coalition of ex-Muslim organisations has marked the first Apostasy Day, in defence of the right to renounce or change religion and of freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

[Twenty-four ex-Muslim groups](#) organised the day on Saturday 22 August, to coincide with a UN day which commemorates the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief.

The organisations included the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB) and similar groups from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, North America and the Pacific.

Human rights activist Maryam Namazie launched a [petition to mark the day](#), which has received almost 6,000 signatures at the time of writing.

The National Secular Society is among groups who have [lent support to the petition](#).

The petition, which has been translated into 13 languages including English, calls for:

- The commemoration of the victims of apostasy laws.
- An end to the criminalisation of apostates and the death penalty for apostasy in countries under Islamic laws.
- An end to shunning, threats and honour-related violence from families of apostates.
- Affirmation of freedom of thought, conscience and belief as well as opinion and expression, in compliance with the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights.

It notes that abandoning or renouncing religion is effectively [punishable by death in 12 Muslim-majority countries](#), and that those deemed apostates face violence, threats and shunning elsewhere.

In the week after Apostasy Day, [CEMB](#) said it had been "a huge success". Maryam Namazie [said](#) 83,000 people had engaged in the day, reaching 233,000 people.

## NSS comment

**NSS chief executive Stephen Evans congratulated the organisers of the day for "raising awareness of a hugely important issue".**

**"Many of those who renounce or question religion face significant human rights abuses, particularly in many Muslim-majority countries.**

**"The right to religious freedom must include the right to renounce or change religion for all."**

*Image: Activists showed their support for Apostasy Day on social media, sharing the hashtags [#HandsUpforApostasyDay](#) [#ApostasyDay](#) [#ApostasyNotACrime](#).*

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